



Israel Strikes Iran in Retaliation

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On 26 October, Israel conducted airstrikes in Iran in retaliation for the Iranian missile attack on Israel on 1 October. The scale of the Israeli operation was significant but limited to military targets. In the short term, Israel maintains the military edge and the opportunity to undertake further action, which complicates Iran's response.

Why did Israel launch an airstrike on Iran?

Israel's latest operation was justified by the need to respond to [Iran's ballistic missile strikes of 1 October](#), and above all by the necessity to restore deterrence of [Iran and its allies](#) from further missile and [terrorist attacks](#). Israel's decision on the timing and scale of its strike was influenced by several factors. The weakening of Palestinian Hamas and [Lebanese Hezbollah](#) has reduced those groups' capabilities to attack as proxies of Iran. The indefinite deployment of the U.S. THAAD missile defence battery to Israel also strengthened and relieved its defences. Israel also wanted to adapt and to punish Iran for the 1 October mass ballistic missile attack (the Iranian tactics and systems used in that attack [were different than on 13-14 April](#)). The Israeli operation required precise reconnaissance and planning as well as solving logistical problems (including midair refuelling), which is why the preparation took over three weeks. As with the first airstrike on Iran on 19 April, Israel's selection of targets was likely influenced by the U.S. pressure not to attack nuclear and oil sector infrastructures. Moreover, Israel this time confirmed it had retaliated against Iran, something it did not do on 19 April (when the S-300 air defence system targeted) or during the more than a decade of [covert sabotage](#) actions and [assassinations in Iran](#). This may indicate Israel's readiness to engage in open confrontation with Iran and raising the credibility of deterrence.

How was Israel's operation carried out and what were the targets?

In three waves of airstrikes, Israel used more than 100 F-15, F-16, and F-35 airplanes and some long-range drones to attack targets scattered across three western provinces of Iran. The Israeli Air Force used the airspace of Jordan, Syria, and Iraq in the operation. The jets released Golden Horizon and ROCKS air-launched ballistic missiles from a safe distance above Iraq. The first to be destroyed were probably several S-300 air defence systems, which until now have been the pillars of the air and missile defence around the capital of Iran. Israeli strikes in Khojir also targeted solid-fuel plant for the newer generation of ballistic missiles, although the actual damage and its impact on Iran's offensive capabilities remain to be verified. Another strike was reported to hit the Space Research Centre in Shahrud, where the development of satellites and space launch vehicles is underway. Israeli missiles and combat drones also targeted a research and development centre in Parchin currently used by the Revolutionary Guards in work on conventional explosives and drones. This target was also of symbolic significance because Parchin was part of Iran's covert nuclear programme until 2003, studying implosion warhead design. However, Israel did not attack any part of Iran's current nuclear programme or oil sector facilities. Overall, the whole operation can be considered to have been precise and effective. So far, Iran has confirmed the deaths of four soldiers of its regular armed forces and one civilian.

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How have the authorities of Iran and other countries reacted to the operation?

Iran filed an official protest to the UN Security Council and once again invoked its right to self-defence and a “proportionate response at the appropriate time”. However, the reaction of Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was rather ambiguous, which may suggest a lack of readiness for immediate escalation. Iranian media exaggerated the effectiveness of its own defence during the airstrikes and later downplayed the effectiveness and importance of Israeli operation. Iran’s reluctance to continue crisis might be also indicated by the fact that its new foreign minister reiterated his country [readiness to resume nuclear negotiations with the West](#). Several EU states and the U.S. have appealed again to both Israel and Iran to de-escalate. Most Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, this time publicly condemned the Israel’s airstrikes. They were demonstrating their lack of support for Israel, even if the airspace of some of them was used by the Israeli Air Force. As with the Israel-Iran exchange of strikes in April, the government of Iran threatened some Arab states with unspecified retaliatory actions.

Which factors will influence next steps by Iran and Israel?

The calculations of both sides will be strongly influenced by their assessment of the U.S. election and the transition period between the outgoing and the next U.S.

administration. Israel may want to take advantage of a few months of relatively greater freedom for retaliatory or even preventive operations in Iran. Continued U.S. support for the security of Israel allows it to consider and plan a more ambitious campaign against Iran. The main limitations for Israel are still its geographical distance and the intense involvement of its air force in ongoing operations in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. The fact that Iran is facing even more serious limitations of its strategic capabilities may encourage Israel to escalate further. The credibility of Iran’s deterrence is weakening proportionally to the growing losses of Hezbollah, [the weakness of the Syrian regime](#) and repeated [U.S. strikes on the Houthi militia in Yemen](#). Further Israel’s strikes on the S-300 network of Iran could mean that the latter is facing degradation of its defensive capabilities. Strengthening of Iran’s air defence would require broader support from Russia, which itself is in dire need of S-300 and S-400 systems to counter the [Ukrainian long-range drone campaign](#). Without a sufficient number of air defence systems and modern airplanes, Iran has no way to effectively defend most of its military, economic, and nuclear centres. If the reports that Israel inflicted significant damage on the Iranian solid-fuel production line for ballistic missiles are confirmed, Iran will need some time and more resources to rebuild its offensive arsenal. This is in addition to replenishing reserves reduced by the two large missile salvos on Israel and [ongoing deliveries of Iranian missiles to Russia](#).